

Dentures & Denture Care

A denture is a removable prosthesis or appliance (complete or partial) made to replace natural teeth.

Dentures are naturally retained in the mouth due to a combination of factors. Learning to eat with artificial teeth requires considerable skill and practice. This is because every person's mouth has a different structure, which can affect the retention and stability of the denture. Also the level of suction which helps hold the denture in place, particularly the upper denture, will vary according to the amount of saliva produced. Many denture wearers find the lower denture particularly difficult to manage at first. Experience will help as will the use of a carefully selected denture fixative which can help to keep the denture in place and stable.

However well fitting the dentist has made the dentures, they can never provide the biting and chewing efficiency of natural teeth. Using a denture fixative will help to give confidence and dispel many fears about wearing dentures. Even well fitting dentures can benefit and become more stable and secure. The ingredients work together to hold the denture in place and provide a strong and lasting hold that can help to reduce the 'wobble', so eating apples, crusty bread and other foods can be enjoyed again.

Gum irritation

A fixative also acts as a supporting layer between dentures and gums. It helps reduce the effects of any pressure spots, helps prevent the dentures rubbing and makes them more comfortable. A fixative will make you more confident when meeting people and eating out.

Dirty dentures are unattractive and may smell or taste unpleasant; in addition, deposits on the dentures can be harmful to the health of gums and any remaining teeth. Deposits on dentures are the same as those that occur on natural teeth and include: food particles, stains, calculus (tartar) and bacterial deposits (plaque). Certain foods and drinks such as tea, coffee and red wine can cause staining, as can tobacco. A denture which has plaque and tartar present will stain more quickly than a denture which is kept clean.

It is a good idea to develop a regular routine for cleaning dentures. Cleaning them at the same time as any remaining natural teeth will make sure that it is done regularly. Whatever the type of denture, it is best to rinse it after every meal and remove any debris with a soft brush, a denture cleaner and warm water. Dentures should be cleaned over a basin half filled with warm water to minimise the risk of damage they are dropped.

Brushing is the most essential aspect of cleaning a denture. Soaking a denture in a cleansing solution alone is not enough. Use a brush (a large toothbrush is fine) to reach into all the crevices of the denture, especially the fitting surface (the part that contacts your gums) and, in the case of partial dentures, inside any metal parts such as clasps. Using a specialist denture cleansing paste is probably the most effective way of removing food debris and bacterial deposits (plaque) and preventing the build up of stains or tartar.

Deposits of tartar (a bit like the 'fur' in a kettle) are less likely if your dentures are always kept clean. However, they can be a problem for some people. No commercially available denture

cleanser is effective in removing such deposits and this needs to be done professionally by your dentist or in a dental laboratory, where your dentures can easily be descaled and repolished.

Dentures made of metal and plastic

Rinse the denture thoroughly after every meal and remove debris by brushing with a soft brush, soap and warm water. In the evening, clean it thoroughly with a brush and denture cleaning paste. Do NOT soak the denture in a hypochlorite type of cleanser, an acid or household cleanser. Remove it overnight and leave it in cold water. This helps to keep your gums healthy.

Temporary soft lining materials

Sometimes the dentist may 'reline' the denture with a temporary soft lining material and this requires special care:

Rinse the denture after every meal with cold water.

After about a week or when the soft material shows signs of hardening, a soft brush may be used to assist cleaning. The denture may be soaked in a hypochlorite type of cleanser for 20 minutes and then rinsed thoroughly with cold water.

Remove the denture overnight and leave in cold water.

Do not use an alkaline peroxide type of cleanser (the ones that make 'fizzy' solutions) as this will cause the material to harden and become rough.

Permanent soft lining materials

If your denture has a permanent rubber lining:

Rinse the denture after every meal and remove debris by brushing with a soft brush, soap and cold water.

Soak the denture in a hypochlorite type of cleanser for 20 minutes every evening.

Rinse thoroughly and leave in cold water overnight.

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Commercially available denture cleansers generally fall into one of the following categories:-

Paste cleansers

Paste cleansers are available in tubes, like toothpaste, but are formulated to be non-abrasive to the plastic of a denture. Many ordinary toothpastes are too abrasive to be used on plastic although perfectly suitable for natural teeth.

Alkaline peroxides

These are supplied either as a large tablet or as a powder which is dissolved in warm water to produce an effervescent solution in which dentures are soaked for a prescribed period.

Liquid cleansers

There are relatively few of these. Current products are usually based either on a dilute solution of hypochlorite (smell of chlorine or bleach) or contain a dilute acid. Neither of these types should be used on metal dentures and the manufacturer's labelling usually includes a note of caution about this.